

The Department of Health and Human Services on Tuesday released \$3.7 million in home heating assistance to Vermont, announced Sen. Patrick Leahy, Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Peter Welch.

The grant is part of a nationwide release of \$1.2 billion in Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding to help eligible families pay for the cost of heating their homes. The funds are the second installment of regular LIHEAP block grants to be released this fiscal year. The program was funded with \$5.1 billion this year – its highest ever – because of legislation sponsored by Sanders and cosponsored by Leahy and Welch.

“As many Vermonters struggle to endure a cold winter in a tough economy, we must do all we can to provide critical resources, like home heating, to those in need,” said Leahy, Sanders and Welch. “While this funding will help many Vermonters stay warm this winter, we must continue to fight for emergency funding to ensure than nobody in our state faces the choice between food, medicine and heat.”

Separately, Leahy, Sanders and Welch signed letters to President Obama last week urging him to release an additional \$590 million in emergency LIHEAP funds as soon as possible to address the increase in demand for heating assistance. They also urged the president to include sufficient funds for LIHEAP in his fiscal year 2011 budget request.

After Congress doubled funding for home heating assistance in 2009, a record 8.3 million households nationwide received aid. This winter, as a result of the lingering recession, more than 10 million families are expected to need help keeping the heat turned on.

In Vermont, the emergency assistance could provide millions of dollars in addition to the \$25.6 million already allocated for the state, matching the funding level last winter when 26,313 households got help, 4,633 more than the year before.